



are we keeping pace?

TRANSPORTATION

How does the County plan for growth from a transportation perspective?

As each area master plan is developed, the Planning Board staff forecasts trip-making up to 30 years into the future to understand the demand that must be served by transit and roads. Each major plan is examined to determine the balance between the travel demand generated by the amount and type of housing and employment, and the planned network of transit lines and roads. If a draft plan appears to be imbalanced, it is usually revised by adding more road or transit improvements, or reducing the density of future land use, or some of both. Infrequently, if the economic development of an area is deemed to be of paramount importance, the balance point between land use and transportation is revised to tolerate a higher level of congestion. This approach is most often applied to the County's urban centers.

How does the County plan for transportation needs as developments are reviewed and approved?

With a few exceptions, any development but the smallest must satisfy two transportation reviews before it can be approved. Transportation Policy Area Review (TPAR) evaluates whether or not there is sufficient road capacity and bus service in the general area of the development. If not, the development can pass the test if it pays an amount equal to a 25 percent impact tax surcharge or 50 percent if both road capacity and bus service are inadequate. These funds can only be used to address shortfall in road capacity and transit service.

Local Area Transportation Review (LATR) analyzes whether the traffic stemming from a development—together with existing traffic and traffic from already approved but yet unbuilt developments—will cause a congestion problem at nearby intersections. If so, the development must pay for improvements to compensate for the additional traffic it generates or, alternatively, fund programs that will reduce traffic demand so the intersections are no worse than if the development never happened.

Does widening a road usually result in reduced congestion?

Building a new road or widening an existing road almost always reduces congestion, but the effects may be small on any one road at any given time. As congestion increases on a road, traffic spreads out to other routes and the duration of the congestion increases as commuters seek to avoid the worst congestion by traveling earlier or later. If that road is widened, many drivers will return to their original route and time of travel, but a net benefit will occur because congestion on other routes and other times (i.e., the "shoulder" of the peaks) is reduced. Only a large road improvement will produce a dramatic reduction in demand. For example, after the Intercounty Connector (ICC) had opened to traffic and operated for a few years, traffic on parallel roads decreased by about 10 percent, on average.

How do the Planning Department and the County's Department of Transportation coordinate their efforts?

The Planning Department takes the lead on developing the transportation elements of master plans and the review of subdivisions to assure that adequate public facility requirements are met. The County's Department of Transportation (DOT) provides substantive advice on both. On the other hand, DOT is responsible for designing and building individual road, transit, bikeway and sidewalk projects, operating the traffic control system and providing local bus service (Ride On). The Planning Department provides an advisory role on the design of capital projects, usually through the mandatory referral process.

Three other agencies have major roles in Montgomery County's transportation. The State Highway Administration (SHA) is responsible for improvements, operations, and maintenance of the Interstate highways, US Route 29 and other roads (MD 355, MD 97, etc.), which carry the majority of traffic in the County. The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) funds the operation and improvements to the MARC commuter rail line through the middle of the County, and has planned and will fund the construction and operation of the future Purple Line light rail system. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) improves, operates and maintains the Metrorail system (including the Red Line) and Metrobus service. Both the Planning Department and DOT work closely with these agencies on a daily basis.

What are the current travel statistics?

After increasing 3-5 percent annually in the 1980s and 1990s, motor vehicle traffic volume has stabilized during the past 15 years. Among the County residents who work, 61 percent commute to locations within the County; of those employed in the County, 47 percent are County residents. Currently, 66 percent of County residents who work drive alone, 9 percent carpool, 16 percent commute by transit, 6 percent work at home, 2 percent walk to work and about 1 percent bike.

What investments would make the most impact on our mobility needs?

Transit investment would have the most impact in those areas that have or will have the density to support it: inside the Beltway and in the corridors reaching north around Interstate 270 and US Route 29. Light rail and bus rapid transit are the most cost-effective and least disruptive means of providing quality transit service to these areas. In the lower density areas at the edges of the County's corridors, new and widened roads are the most effective.

Source: Montgomery County Council Staff